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State parks to feature healthier menu items for kids

The 17 restaurants operated by the Kentucky State Parks are offering healthier options on their child menus.

The Kentucky State Parks have joined "Better Bites: Restaurant Edition," a project of the Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition in Lexington. The coalition focuses on making healthy eating and regular physical activity popular and accessible for children ages 9-13.

Some examples of the changes that meet the Better Bites nutrition guidelines are smaller hamburgers and cheeseburgers on whole-wheat buns; peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on whole-wheat bread; and half turkey sandwiches on whole wheat. All child menu items are served with a side of fresh fruit and vegetable sticks.

With the changes, 80 percent of the child menu items are considered Better Bites options. Though Better Bites selections are featured on the child menus, adults also may order them.

For more information on Better Bites, visit www.tweenslex.org. For information about Kentucky State Parks, including lodging and camping reservations, visit www.parks.ky.gov.



Youngest students will benefit from funding

Nearly \$1.2 million will go to 58 Community Early Childhood Councils (CECCs) impacting 91 Kentucky counties to promote school readiness.

Individual grants range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 per county. The CECCs are composed of community volunteers from local school districts, public health departments, childcare providers, Head Start, local libraries, parents and interest groups in many other areas.

CECCs develop strategies for improving early childhood care and education by assessing the unique needs of each community and building upon current strengths to explore creative ways to meet those needs. This year's grant applications asked CECC's to use county-level data to develop collaborative strategies focused on improving school readiness.

The CECCs used the Early Childhood Profile, a county-by-county profile that shows kindergarten readiness data; participation in publicly funded preschool, Head Start and child care; quality and availability of child care and the education of the early childhood workforce; and demographic data that represent key indicators of possible barriers to success for young children and their families as a planning tool.

Fourteen additional counties have been invited to participate in technical assistance to build local council capacity and apply for grant funding later this year.

For more information, go to <http://kidsnow.ky.gov>.

SPECIAL REPORT

National education study: Kentucky among most rapidly improving states

Kentucky recorded better-than-expected gains in student achievement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and is leading the way as a high-performing state among those receiving waivers from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The findings are among those in a recently released national study, *The New State Achievement Gap: How Federal Waivers Could Make It Worse – Or Better* by Education Sector Reports.

"We have been aggressive about making improvements in our schools, and this study is proof that those efforts are paying off," Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said. "While achievement gaps remain among student groups, we are making progress."



Terry Holliday

"Kentucky is no longer among the bottom states when it comes to education."

The study compares student gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 2003-11 in grades 4 and 8, reading and mathematics for all students.

Kentucky students recorded an overall gain of 28.2 points, which translates into almost three-fourths of a year of improved achievement per assessment from 2003-11.

That is better than the national average gain of 20 points, about a half-year of achievement gains per test. Nationally, blacks, Hispanics and students eligible for free or reduced-price meals

showed significantly greater gains than white students, somewhat narrowing the achievement gap – the intention of the No Child Left Behind Act.

When taking into account predicted gains based on starting points and economic disadvantage, Kentucky charted the fourth-highest gains in the country behind Maryland, Massachusetts and New Jersey.

"Normally, non-school factors such as initial scores and family background and income have a significant impact on student achievement," Holliday said. "However, in this case, non-school factors account for little of the variation in gains. That means state policy and school improvement are at the root of our progress."

Holliday said Kentucky built upon its successes under NCLB in its request for ESEA flexibility.

"Moving from a goal of proficiency to a more rigorous goal of college/career-readiness for all students raises the bar on student achievement," Holliday said. "In addition, we have developed measures and the capacity to intervene in schools that are not making progress. Our new Professional Growth and Effectiveness System will round out improvement efforts by ensuring every child is taught by an effective teacher and every school is led by an effective principal."

The report concludes that as Congress works to reauthorize ESEA, it should consider progress made in states like Kentucky to identify measures that reduce inequality and continue to give states the freedom allowed by waivers as long as they are held accountable for what students achieve.

The full report may be accessed [here](#).



Families can search for the stars, learn about dwarf planets at August UK astronomy event

The University of Kentucky Physics and Astronomy Department is inviting families to its observatory Aug. 8 for a presentation on dwarf planets.

The 45-minute astronomy program will begin at 8 p.m. in Room 155 of the Chemistry-Physics Building. Afterward, participants may view the sky through a 20-inch telescope, weather permitting.

Free parking is available on the top floor of parking structure No. 2, next to the observatory. With the exception of paid parking, without a valid parking permit, leaving your vehicle somewhere other than next to the observatory will result in a parking citation. For more information, contact Tim Knauer at (859) 257-7147.

Pioneer Life Week at Carter Caves State Resort Park set for July 22-28

Families may experience what Kentucky was like more than 200 years ago during Pioneer Life Week at Carter Caves State Resort Park July 22-28.

Most events are free to the public. Some of the programs include flint knapping; spinning and weaving demonstrations; cabin chinking; horn-smithing demonstrations; and pioneer clothing interpretation. For more information, call the park toll-free at (800)325-0059 or (606) 286-4411.

National Center for Family Literacy partners in council that hopes to help Latino educational outcomes

The Louisville-based National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop recently announced the formation of the Aprendiendo Juntos (Learning Together) Council.

This multi-sector group of researchers, practitioners and policy experts will identify models and practical strategies that improve educational outcomes for Hispanic-Latino families through the deployment of digital technologies. The council will use research to influence public and private sector investments in effective programs and practices.

The council is developing new studies on a regional and national scale that focus on Hispanic-Latino families' digital technology usage. Council members have completed a [report](#) reviewing existing research and best practices in the field, which was recently released.

This summer, the council will support innovative field studies directed by Vikki Katz of Rutgers University examining the rollout of the national [Connect2Compete](#) digital media literacy initiative in select districts of California and Arizona. The council also will conduct a special analysis of a national survey conducted by Ellen Wartella of Northwestern University of media usage by Latino parents and their children ages 0-10 to be released fall 2013.

In June 2012, NCFL convened the first Hispanic-Latino Families and Digital Technologies Forum in partnership with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop and the National Council of La Raza.

The forum brought together some of the United States' best researchers, innovators, thought leaders and educators dedicated to the vital topic of how, and in which contexts, today's Hispanic-Latino families are learning from the rapidly changing innovations in information communications technologies. The Aprendiendo Juntos Council was established as a new working group.

Seizing the summer

When school is out, parents should help kids stay active and engaged in learning



It's been a wet summer so far, but hopefully that is changing and parents can take children outside for some healthy exercising of their minds and bodies.

Here are some suggestions to help with that from Kelsey Donohue, who is with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Communication and Outreach.

Be creative

Summer is the perfect time to let your child's imagination run wild and stimulate creativity. Kids.gov provides resources for arts and crafts projects that will keep children engaged and their minds active while having fun.

- [NGA Kids](#) – Choose from a variety of activities or projects from the National Gallery of Art, enjoy an animated musical adventure or take a tour through the sculpture garden and more.
- [Smithsonian](#) – Are your children fans of *Night at the Museum*? Then this is the perfect activity for them. Here they are magically taken to the museums at night. To get back home, they have to solve mysteries and help new friends find their artworks.

Stay active and healthy

In addition to academic risks, children also can be at an increased risk of weight gain when they are out of school during the summer months. Take advantage of the warmer weather, and keep youth active outdoors.

- KidsHealth.org – How do you feed a picky eater or encourage a child to play outside? Learn how to keep your child healthy with the right foods and exercise.
- [Let's Move!](#) – Opportunities for kids to be physically active, both in and out of school, and create new opportunities for families to be moving together.
- [USDA Summer Food Program](#) – This U.S. Department of Agriculture program provides free meals to all children 18 years old and under in areas with significant concentrations of low-income children. For more about this effort in Kentucky, check out the [June 17](#) issue of *ParentInfo*.

For additional tips throughout the summer, follow [@usedgov](#) on Twitter, and check out the [U.S. Department of Education](#) Facebook page.

The [June 5](#) issue of *ParentInfo* has more summer-related information, too.



ACT study targeting career goals

From ACT

ACT recently issued a *Work Readiness Standards and Benchmarks* report that presented a first-ever definition of work readiness – an empirically-driven definition based on what is arguably the most extensive and detailed skills database in the world.

Today ACT builds on that foundation with *The Condition of Work Readiness in the United States*. This report examines data collected from approximately 4 million ACT WorkKeys examinees over the past five years and compares their skills with work-readiness benchmarks for targeted high-growth, high-demand and high-wage occupations for the next eight to 10 years. Some of the surprising findings:

There is no significant gap between the skills needed for middle-level education jobs and the skills possessed by middle-level education examinees. The skills of individuals with middle-level education (at least one but fewer than four years of postsecondary education beyond high school) align with the work-readiness requirements for middle-level education jobs. This finding suggests that, for the targeted occupations examined, middle education aligns with the work-readiness requirements.

Higher levels of education do not guarantee higher levels of work readiness. Education level does not always align with work-readiness levels. Attaining the required education level for a job doesn't necessarily equip the individual with the work-readiness skills needed for successful job performance. The largest gaps occur in locating-information skills: the ability to locate, synthesize and use information from workplace graphics.

This latest ACT report is the third in a series exploring the role of skills in today's job market and the growing importance skill levels play in predicting workplace success. The first report in the series, *A Better Measure of Skills Gaps*, proposed a new approach to defining and measuring skills gaps.

Download all three free reports at www.act.org/workreadiness.

Beshear to chair Southern Regional Education Board

Gov. Steve Beshear was recently elected to lead the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), an 80-member board of governors, legislators and state education leaders that explores advancing student educational performance.

In 2011, Beshear was named America's Greatest Education Governor by the National Education Association for making great strides to improve public schools.

SREB works with 16 member states.

A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, SREB was created in 1948 by Southern governors and legislators to help education and government leaders advance education and improve the social and economic life of the region.

Kentucky Department of Education

Address:

Division of Communications
500 Mero St., 6th floor CPT,
Frankfort, KY 40601

Phone: (502) 564-2000, ext. 4621

Fax: (502) 564-3049

Contact:

susan.riddell@education.ky.gov